

the same damn hunger by TolkienGirl

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Angst

Language: English

Characters: Nancy W., Steve H.

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-10-31 14:18:43

Updated: 2017-10-31 14:18:43

Packaged: 2019-12-17 04:39:11

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 805

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Nancy patches Steve's face up. His heart, not so much.
(Steve & Nancy, 2x09. Angst.) (Title from a Halsey song.)

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He doesn't think it gets easier.

Then again, that's a stupid thought to have right now. He's on the edge of the Byers' sink, with Nancy's hands on his messed-up face, and he's thinking about his feelings.

Someone had to fix him up, when it was all over. Hell, he should probably go to the hospital, but he can't put that risk on everyone. Plus, Will and the Eleven chick are definitely worse off than he is.

Nancy seems a little worse for wear herself, or at least, he thinks so. His eyes are practically swollen shut at this point. The adrenaline's worn off and he feels like refried shit. Looks it, too.

Pathetic. That's the only word to describe it, when you're not even sure why a bunch of thirteen-year-olds want to hang with you.

"Sorry, I'm really sweaty," she says. It's awkward. It has to be awkward. Her hair is stuck to her neck and her shirt is stuck to her bra and she shouldn't have to apologize to him. It's not like she's ever going to be anything less than perfect as far as he's concerned.

Not that it matters.

"Is the little Byers going to be OK?"

She nods. A shadow passes over her face, like she's remembering something terrible. "I think so."

He's shaking. He curls his hands around the edge of the countertop, because otherwise he thinks he might fall over. That, of course, reminds him that every single one of his knuckles is split.

"Can you tilt your chin up a little?" Nancy starts with the band-aids that the kids must have slapped all over him, when he was passed out. She peels them off one by one, and he tries not to remind himself that this is probably the last time she's ever going to touch him like this.

Time passes. There are voices everywhere, voices like ghosts, and someone's crying, and yeah, that's Dustin getting excited, and Steve can't focus on anything except the awful colors in the shower curtain and the way Nancy's fingers get caught in his hair when she's pushing it off his forehead.

"This is going to sting, sorry," she says, holding up a paper towel soaked in disinfectant, and yeah, *yeah it really is*.

He doesn't say much. His tongue feels like it's been wound up in cotton that someone was considerate enough to soak in piss. He can't find a single spot that *doesn't* hurt.

Nancy's cleaning the cut over the bridge of his nose. It's a bitch, that cut. She's squinting her eyes a little, all concentration. She's close enough to kiss.

She's never going to kiss him again.

Jonathan Byers, with his camera and his brother and his hunched shoulders and his habit of being where he's needed—yeah. He's winning this round.

Steve stays silent while she pokes around in the first-aid kit and finds some butterflies. She says, "You should probably see a doctor."

He says, "Why are you doing this?"

She takes a step back, like the ground just shifted under her feet. "What—why wouldn't I?"

He doesn't have an answer for that. Truth is, he never knows why anyone spares him a second glance. But up until now, they *have*. It's like he's the world's luckiest bastard, until he isn't anymore.

"Forget it," he says, but softly. He's pretty sure he's the last to catch on, pretty sure she went with Jonathan behind his back, pretty sure he can't find it in himself to be angry.

Nancy Wheeler hasn't loved him for a long time.

If she ever did.

"Steve," she says. There's a little flavor of that old shy coaxing, that used to drive him crazy. "I—I want us to still be friends."

He feels no older than the dumb little shitheads he was just ready to die for. He feels, quite frankly, too young for this shit.

He's going to love her forever, or something. Doesn't matter which, because nobody is going to watch what happens to him.

"Steve?"

"You did a good job, Nance," he says. He gets down off the sink, but not very gracefully. His bones are stiff. "I think I should probably try to get home."

"*Steve.*"

He wishes that she'd stop saying his name. He can't stop himself, so he reaches out and takes her hand. When he holds tight, it hurts like hell, what with his bruises and his heart. Then he leaves.

He doesn't think it gets easier.